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## Travels Through Heterotopia: The Textual Realms of Patrick Modiano's *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* and Mikhail Kuraev's *Kapitan Dikshtein*

### Abstract

Within contemporary prose, one distinct mode or paradigm that can be discerned is constituted by the texts that daringly tackle the dark, suppressed, erased parts of our history and mentality; however, they approach this task not by way of self-righteous denunciatory investigations, but by provocatively problematizing the most established everyday facts, by depriving the reader of the possibility of even conceiving any firm ground of the stable construct of an origin or a self-identification—historically and culturally. Their irreverent and playful deconstruction of the all-pervasive national cultural mythologies has mounted a powerful challenge to ideological constructs big and small. This article considers two representative examples of texts of this kind, which the author proposes to call heterotopic: Patrick Modiano's *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* and Mikhail Kuraev's *Kapitan Dikshtein*. It offers an attempt at defining this paradigm through a reading of these two novels, drawing upon Michel Foucault's usage of the term "heterotopia" for the purpose of designating the "other" cultural spaces of our civilization, as well as on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "minor literature" and the work of several other theorists. The texts of the kind exemplified by these two novels are considered as an instance of successful partaking in the project of cognitive mapping, which has been proposed by Fredric Jameson and others as the positive political edge of postmodern culture.

### Keywords

heterotopia, Patrick Modiano, contemporary prose, dark, suppressed, erased, history, mentality, self-righteous, self-identification, national cultural mythologies, ideological constructs, heterotopic, Patrick Modiano, *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, Mikhail Kuraev, *Kapitan Dikshtein*, Michel Foucault, other, cultural spaces, civilization, Deleuze and Guattari, minor literature, Fredric Jameson, cognitive mapping, postmodern culture, political

Travels Through Heterotopia: The Textual Realms  
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. . . et nos vies ne sont-elles pas  
aussi rapides à se dissiper dans  
le soir que ce chagrin d'enfant?

Patrick Modiano,  
*Rue des Boutiques Obscures*<sup>1</sup>

Umershii, palyi list lezhal riadom  
s golovoi Voshchera, ego prines  
veter s dal'nego dereva, i teper'  
etomu listie predstoialo smirenie  
v zemle Voshchev podobral  
otsokhshii list i spriatal ego v  
tainoe otdelenie Meshka, gde on  
sberegal vsiakiye predmety  
neschast'ia i bezvestnosti. "Ty ne  
imel smysla zhizhi,—so skupostiù  
sochuvstviià polagal Voshchev,—  
lezhi zdes', ià uznaiù, za chto ty  
zhil i pogib, Raz ty nikomu ne  
nuzhen i valiàeshsià zdes' sredi  
vsego mira, to ià budu tebià  
khranit' i pomnit'!"

Andrei Platonov  
*Kotlovan*<sup>2</sup>

There are coincidences, we are often told, that can unexpectedly shed new light upon phenomena in our culture. In 1987 such a coincidence, perhaps, occurred in Moscow: the simultaneous publication of two novels—Mikhail Kuraev's *Kapitan Dikshtein* (*Captain Dikshtein*) and *Ulitsa Temnykh Lavok*, the Russian translation of Patrick Modiano's *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*.<sup>3</sup> It is entirely probable that the two authors, although they have gained a place of prominence in their respective national literatures, are not even aware of each other's existence; nevertheless, their texts engage a range of issues of great topicality for contemporary culture, and their respective strategies for doing so display some remarkable similarities. They constitute what I here propose to call heterotopic texts.

In defining a heterotopic text I am drawing upon several sources. Most immediately this notion stems from Michel Foucault's usage of the term "heterotopia" for the purpose of designating the "other" cultural spaces of our civilization, as outlined in the preface to his *The Order of Things* and further developed in his lecture "Of Other Spaces." Heterotopias, together with utopias, constitute the type of cultural sites "that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect." But while utopias are "sites with no real space" that "have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society," heterotopias are spaces that do exist within society. They are, writes Foucault, "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" ("Of Other Spaces" 24).

In "Of Other Spaces," Foucault sketches a typology of heterotopic sites within the "actually existing" space—boarding schools, prisons, mental hospitals, libraries, museums, fairs, brothels, ships; however, the concept itself is arrived at through a reading of a literary text, namely, a short story by Borges (*The Order of Things* xv-xx). Heterotopia, for Foucault, arises out of the heteroclitite—a term used to designate grammatical or geometrical anomalies. While utopias "afford consolation," heterotopias "are disturbing," he writes, "because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less

apparent syntax which causes words and things . . . to 'hold together' " (*The Order of Things* xviii).

A related notion of heterotopics and heterotopic space is advanced as a semiotic concept by A.J. Greimas. Space, as a signifying form, can exist only as a result of projection of organizing human activity onto expanse, taken in its continuity and plenitude. Heterotopics, then, is the requirement for any knowledge and apprehension of space or of a point in it: one cannot speak of this topos without postulating the existence of other topoi. Only then, stresses Greimas, can discourse on space take place (*Narrative Semiotics* 139-40).<sup>4</sup> It is thus the idea of the plurality of spatial ontological possibilities, a foregrounding of this plurality, and a crucial emphasis on otherness that the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia shares with the heterotopics of semiotics.

The notion of heterotopia is further developed by Gianni Vattimo, who in his *The Transparent Society* writes of "a transition from utopia to heterotopia" as "the most radical transformation in the relation between art and everyday life to have occurred since the sixties" (62). In contrast to the unilinear, rigid organization of a utopia, it is the heterotopia, with its underlying principle of plurality, that, for Vattimo, dominates the aesthetic experience today (68-69). Thus, heterotopia becomes in effect an alternative designation for postmodern culture as such.<sup>5</sup>

In literature, the notion of heterotopia was taken up most notably by Brian McHale.<sup>6</sup> In his study *Postmodernist Fiction*, he conceives of it as a "problematic world . . . designed . . . for the purpose of exploring ontological propositions" (43). However, McHale restricts his use of the term to the description of allegorical "other worlds" depicted in works of fiction, such as "the Zone" in the novels of William Burroughs, in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, or in Julio Cortazar's *62: A Model Kit*, or the Empire of the Great Khan in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*—textual realms where "a large number of fragmentary possible worlds coexist in an impossible space" (45). I believe the term can be used in the more general sense of textual organization proper; that is, the heterotopia is not that which the text *describes* but what it *is*—a condition when multiple textual regimes come into contact to create a new symbiotic entity, a chronotope of coexistence that is simultaneously asserted and ironically subverted.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, it can be viewed as an alternative definition of one of the dominant modes of postmodern

writing—a less restrictive one than, for example, Linda Hutcheon’s “historiographic metafiction.”

Hutcheon’s model of postmodernist prose is shaped through a foregrounding of the latter’s self-awareness of both history and fiction being human constructs; this theoretical underpinning serves as the starting point for these texts’ rethinking and reworking of the past. Their project is not to offer ways of “mending” history, but rather to bring about an awareness that all our attempts at “repairing” it are human constructs, which is what constitutes their value as well as their limitation. Repairs are comforting—but they are illusory. Postmodernist interrogations of traditional teleologies live within that contradiction. Theirs is an attempt not to erase or ridicule the past, but to produce an awareness that every representation has undeniable ideological implications.<sup>8</sup>

Heterotopia seems to be a more felicitous designation for the texts in question, since the centrality of the “other” in its semantics points to a particular strategy for the interrogation of cultural constructs they perform—through focusing on the experiences of the marginal, the minor, the underrepresented—which allows us to consider them an instance of the postmodernism of resistance, a notion developed by Hal Foster in his preface to one of the key texts in the discourse on postmodernism, the collection *The Anti-Aesthetic*, and which may serve as an insight into the political edge of these cultural projects.<sup>9</sup> The textual strategy of heterotopia also suggests bringing into the framework of analysis another theoretical concept—Deleuze and Guattari’s “*littérature mineure*” ‘minor literature,’ understood as an umbrella concept for “minor practices of major language from within,” writings from a marginal subject-position. The practitioner of *littérature mineure*, they write, is the one who opts “to make use of polylingualism of one’s own language, to make a minor or intensive use of it, to oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality, to find points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones by which a language can escape . . .” (*Kafka* 26-27). The concept of minor literature is developed by Deleuze not as a temporal one—as is postmodernism—but the names of the authors whose work he brings up in conjunction with it, from Kafka to Beckett to Godard (*Kafka* 18-19; *Dialogues* 4-5), suggest situating this concept within the discourse on modernism/postmodernism. It is indicative that Hutcheon, in effect, states as much, asserting that postmodernism’s interrogation of dominant cultural constructs is

rendered particularly effective by “making the different, the off-center, into the vehicle for aesthetic and even political consciousness raising” (73). Thus, calling a text heteropic would imply that it is preoccupied with exploration of those topoi—cultural, social, linguistic—that lie on the margins of privileged literary discourses.

The writings of Patrick Modiano provide an excellent example of a textual heterotopia. It has been noted that his entire œuvre constitutes a coherent and distinctive fictional universe.<sup>10</sup> It is, to use a term suggested by Viktor Erofeev to describe Vladimir Nabokov’s work, a “*métaroman*” ‘metanovel,’ united by a “*prafabula*” ‘Ur-plot’ (175). Marja Warehime identifies the “constants” of Modiano’s metanovel: the predominant setting—the time of the Nazi occupation of France, and the narrator/protagonist—a man,

an outsider, often not French, sometimes Jewish, frequently both *apatride* and classless, whose charm and manners are simultaneously his *état civil* and his *entrée* into a group of wealthy international adventurers. Alternately timid and ruthless, reckless and terrified, nostalgic and melancholy, he is constantly seeking the stability, security, safety and serenity that neither his situation nor the times permit. (336)<sup>11</sup>

These features of Modiano’s fictional realm, delineating its focus on the displaced, the marginal, the “minor,” are in part autobiographically conditioned. Modiano is “as it were, French by accident” (Prince, “Patrick Modiano” 147): born in July 1945, he is the son of a Flemish actress and a Sephardic Jew from the Middle East who met during World War II in German-occupied France. Aspects of his parents’ and his own biography, caught in the geographical, ethnic, and political mixup of the twentieth century, consistently surface within his novels.

However, it is not only the setting and the characters of Modiano’s books that are heterotopic or “minor”—so are the devices of narrative construction. Although Modiano’s texts, in contrast to the radical “in-your-face” experimental writing of the *nouveaux romanciers*, the Oulipo group, or Philippe Sollers, evoke, in Jacques Bersani’s words, “le charme discret du parfait récit à la française, modèle 1920, marque NRF,” in fact, Bersani argues, they subvert and undermine the classic genre from within by ambiguity, by numerous inexplicable gaps and *invraisemblances* (Bersani, “Patrick Modiano” 78-80). In Modiano’s fiction we encounter, in

Gerald Prince's apt description, a world shaped through a "submersion by a shadowy, turbid, or monstrous past together with the stubborn refusal to accept the disappearance of beings and things, the determination to probe the labyrinths of memory and life, the unending and fumbling search for origins, the obstinate and doomed attempt to establish what happened" ("Re-membering Modiano" 39). In other words, in the textual realm of Modiano's writing the reader comes face to face with the glimmering heterotopic universe that provides both for an expression and a critique of the many quests and desires of a contemporary subject.

*Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, one of Modiano's best known novels—it earned him the Prix Goncourt—is exemplary in its development of the features of his writing outlined above. Its protagonist, a former private detective who had suffered an amnesia ten years prior to the temporal setting of the novel (circa 1965), sets out on a search to recover his lost identity. His quest involves him in an exploration of the Paris of the years prior to and during World War II. It is a cosmopolitan Paris, populated predominantly by expatriates of various origins, with names strange to a French ear; it brings to mind Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr*—a novel which, while set in Paris, does not have a single French character.

The group Guy Roland (the name the protagonist assumed or, rather, was given after his amnesia by his employer, a Russian émigré of Baltic German background, sympathizing with him for the reason that "lui aussi . . . avait perdu ses propres traces et que toute une partie de sa vie avait sombré d'un seul coup, sans qu'il subsistât le moindre fil conducteur, la moindre attache qui aurait pu encore le relier au passé" 'he too . . . had lost track of himself and a whole section of his life had been engulfed without leaving the slightest trace, the slightest connection that could still link him with the past' [*Rue des Boutiques Obscures* 16; *Missing Person* 10]) contacts first in his search is the Russian émigré community in Paris, consisting mostly of people who left in the years immediately after the 1917 Revolution. (It is not entirely clear what exactly prompts this particular first step—is it the analogy of their having lost their past?<sup>12</sup> Probably not, since many of the émigrés maintained they "had taken Russia away with them.") But from them—the group that, if far less cohesive by the 1960s, for a long time persisted in maintaining its distinct identity—he then moves to an utterly heterogeneous mix of people with multiple and conflicting national identities: for a large part of the novel, he believes he was Freddie Howard de Luz, a



descendant of a French-speaking aristocratic family from Mauritius with double British and American citizenship; finally, the version that is apparently the most credible is that he was Jimmy Pedro Stern, born in Salonica in 1912, who was most probably the same person as Pedro McEvoy, a diplomat from the Dominican Republic (both likely to be assumed names) who disappeared in 1944 when he tried to cross the border into Switzerland with his companion (and Stern's wife), Denise Coudreuse (the only "authentique française" among the principal characters), and who earlier had a legal address in Via delle Botteghe Oscure, a street in an old Jewish neighborhood in Rome.

None of this information, though, is conclusive; documents and witnesses seem to escape Guy. People who did not suffer amnesia, whom he interviews, seem not to remember much of that era either: "Nous sommes brouillés avec les dates. . . . De toute façon, cela remonte au déluge. . . ." 'We're not good at dates. . . . But, in any case, it goes back to the beginning of time, all that . . . ' remarks one of the characters (*Rue des Boutiques Obscures* 26; *Missing Person* 17). Throughout the novel, Guy periodically finds himself blinded by bright light during conversations (as, for example, in the opening scene [*Rue des Boutiques Obscures* 11; *Missing Person* 7], and during his conversation with Paul Sonachitzé and Jean Heurteur [*Rue des Boutiques Obscures* 21; *Missing Person* 14])—or, alternatively, remarks that might contain vital information are drowned out by noise (as in the case of his meeting with Waldo Blunt [*Rue des Boutiques Obscures* 61; *Missing Person* 40-41]) or fade out in the fog: "J'étais sûr à ce moment-là qu'il me disait encore quelque chose mais que le brouillard étouffait le son de sa voix" 'I felt certain at that moment that he was saying something else to me but the fog was muffling the sound of his voice' (*Rue des Boutiques Obscures* 50; *Missing Person* 34). The time of the novel itself is "strange, labyrinthian, imprecise," which feeling is "intensified by the vagueness of many of the temporal clues provided, the undatable nature of the deictics punctuating the text" (Prince, *Narrative as Theme* 123). The narrator himself occasionally describes the space he moves through as dream-like: "Les automobiles roulaient vite avenue de New-York, sans qu'on entendît le moteur, et cela augmentait l'impression de rêve que j'éprouvais," 'Traffic on the Avenue de New-York was moving fast but made no sound you could hear, and this increased the dream-like feeling' (*Rue des Boutiques Obscures* 65; *Missing Person* 43). Within this vague realm, there are rather

large-scale “gaps and *invraisemblances*” that go virtually unnoticed—for example, the blank spot covering an entire decade between the disappearance of McEvoy/Stern in 1944 and the emergence of Guy Roland in the mid-1950s.<sup>13</sup> The sensation of vagueness and instability is exacerbated by “the seemingly indiscriminate use of both the *passé composé* and the *passé simple* (the tense for a past that is still pertinent to the present and refuses to end, and the tense for a past that is gone), by the adoption of the imperfect when a preterit may be expected (with the former, boundaries vanish and instants dilate), and by the ambiguity of many a present. . . .” (Prince, *Narrative as Theme* 123-24). Space is equally labyrinthine in this text, as is time, and it is exceedingly hard to track the characters’ convoluted migrations from one part of Paris to the other (Modiano overwhelms the reader with a flood of place-names), let alone from one country to another.

Modiano’s text is thus not a detective novel.<sup>14</sup> Although many of the conventions of that genre are present, the book lacks suspense and is totally unclimactic—with missed opportunities for the protagonist to further the investigation abounding. Nor is it a representative of the “search for one’s roots” tradition (as the author of the preface to the novel’s Russian translation would have it [Vaksmakher 6-7]).<sup>15</sup> It could have been a narrative of either of those types, but these possibilities collapse in a text that enacts the shattering of the “syntax of life” of which Foucault was writing, a text that stages “one ballet of wandering phantoms after another.” Modiano “adopts familiar structures and uses them as if they were not really made for him” (Prince, “Patrick Modiano” 151, 153). His novel, writes Warehime, “embodies a kind of formal hesitation between conventional forms and a (perhaps impossible) new form of practice or writing it suggests through its inconsistencies and lacunae” (343). All these formal features—the plurality and undeterminability of narrative lines, the ethnic and geographical heterogeneity of the *siuzhet*, the text’s temporal, spatial, and even grammatical ambivalence make Modiano’s novel one of the clearest possible manifestations of what a textual heterotopia might be—that textual condition of a balance on the verge of dissolution from a familiar realistic narrative into a puzzle of multiple indeterminate spatiotemporal continua and anomalous textual realms. These formal properties enable *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* to stand as a heterotopic text *par excellence*, a text for which the singular utopian vision of the historical past regained is impossible in principle.

The other novel to be discussed in this essay also manifests many of the properties and preoccupations of heterotopic writing considered above in the case of *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*. Among contemporary Russian writers, Mikhail Kuraev is perhaps the closest in his thematic concerns and formal choices to Modiano. Part of a group of writers who broke into print in the years of perestroika, Kuraev constitutes a fascinating and peculiar case. Born in 1939 (and thus older than Modiano by six years), he published his first novel, *Kapitan Dikshtein* (*Captain Dikshtein*), in 1987, and was immediately recognized as a major new voice in Russian literature. Since then he has been steadily publishing his work in the country's leading literary journals (traditionally the main "purveyors" of literature in Russia, and even more so with the crisis of the country's publishing system that accompanied the disintegration of the Soviet Union). After a long (and frustrating) experience as a scriptwriter at the Lenfilm studios in Leningrad, Kuraev's literary career suddenly took off.

What earned Kuraev's work due recognition was the perspective it brought to its chief thematic concern, exploration of the country's "unpredictable past"—a perspective radically different from most (glasnost-era) bestsellers. At the time of *Kapitan Dikshtein*'s publication, the Soviet Union was going through a boom of rediscovering history and its readers were thrilled by works like Anatolii Rybakov's *Deti Arbata* (*Children of the Arbat*), published earlier that year—a text utterly unremarkable from the artistic point of view, but which dealt with the previously forbidden topic of Stalinist terror of the 1930s. The mode dominating Rybakov's, Solzhenitsyn's, and many other works of fiction dealing with Soviet history published during the years of perestroika (mostly written "into the drawer" in the previous years) was the uncovering of the Real, True History of the nation, hidden and distorted by censorship and official propaganda. Kuraev's works also engage the "blank spots" or "forbidden chapters" of Soviet history—his novel *Nochnoi dozor* (*Night Patrol*, 1988) deals with the Stalinist terror, and *Kapitan Dikshtein* with the Kronstadt sailors' anti-Bolshevik uprising of 1921—however, it has been recognized as an example of "how artistic complexity can vouchsafe a more nuanced treatment of a subject that seems doomed to simplification in the hands of overt polemicists." Kuraev's texts problematize the notion of History as such; the premise that underlies his writing is that "the master narrative of history has disintegrated" (Goscilo, "Introduction," in Goscilo and

Lindsey xxxv). As Byron Lindsey remarks, “Kuraev stands history on its head and then presents it from the perspective of ordinary men with their small passions, large fears, and remarkable gifts for survival. The result is a kind of anti-history with few certainties and reliable landmarks” (Goscilo and Lindsey 460). Writing about the appearance of *Kapitan Dikshtein* in retrospect, Helena Goscilo commented:

Kuraev swam against the tireless tide, inasmuch as his atypical *Kapitan Dikshtein* . . . denarrativized “history as master plot” into random components, not only alinear but also ultimately unknowable (with both fabula and siuzhet eluding certitude). Replacing causality with fortuitous sequentiality, blurring lines between fact and fiction, Kuraev interrogated the primacy of “big events” and the unitary concept of history that shaped the treatment of historical topics in scholarship, journalism, and literature of the period, [in contrast to] glasnost “fiction” and drama . . . intent on recuperating an officially withheld past [which] not only sustained the fictional pretence poorly but also reduced history to the transparency of fully accessible facts inertly awaiting incorporation into a comprehensive Truth. (*Dehexing Sex* 36-37)

Like Modiano’s, Kuraev’s works are stylistically indebted to the national literary tradition. His “whimsical, ornamental style, with intricate sentences and frequent asides to the reader” (Brown 125) evokes numerous comparisons to Gogol’s bitterly ironic prose, as does his focus on “the little man” as the faceless victim of history. Traces of other classical St. Petersburg narratives—notably, those of Dostoevsky and Andrei Bely—are visible as well. In fact, an entire article has been devoted to the discussion of these and other intertextual echoes (such as those of Iurii Tynianov’s “Lieutenant Kizhe” [“Podporuchik Kizhe”] and Mikhail Zoshchenko’s *skaz* narratives) in *Kapitan Dikshtein* and *Nochnoi dozor* (see Dowsett).<sup>16</sup> His writing as such, while evoking the “charm” of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century classics, is not subversive in the same way Modiano’s is; however, the structuring of Kuraev’s texts is rather complex, and there are lines of subversion present, particularly when Gogolian irony is applied to the modern Soviet characters of his works; one of the most obvious instances of this kind can be found in the opening pages of *Kapitan Dikshtein*, where the

hero's slow awakening and the interior of his apartment are described in a tone that clearly echoes the ironic descriptive introductions of the landowners visited by Chichikov in *Dead Souls*.<sup>17</sup>

In the "framing" part of *Kapitan Dikshtein*, which, similarly to *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, is set in the 1960s, the last day in the life of the protagonist is narrated in slow, minute detail, with a degree of attention to the most mundane things that imparts a near-surreal sensation of a distortion through extreme closeup: he gets up, puts on his clothes, goes to the store to exchange empty glass bottles for the deposit, buys some beer, visits the town courthouse and a pub, and dies in the street. It is in the numerous authorial asides, digressions and historical excursuses that the bulk of the narrative is presented.<sup>18</sup> The novel is subtitled "*fantasticheskoe povestvovanie*" '*fantastic narrative*'—which could perhaps strike one as an odd choice for a historical novel; however, it perfectly fits the logic of the text: Kuraev's novel does not contain descriptions of anything mythical or supernatural—it is the course of Russia's history itself, the twists it puts into individual human destinies that are indeed "fantastic." "Where are you to look for fantastic heroes and fantastic events," notes the novel's narrator, "Gde zhe eshche prikazhete iskat' fantasticheskikh geroev i fantasticheskie sobytiia, kak ne v chernykh dyrakh istorii, poglotivshikh, nado polagat', ne odnogo liubopytstvuiushchego, neraschetlivo zaglianuvshego cherez krai!" 'if not in the black holes of history, which, one must assume, swallowed more than one careless, curious man who dared to look over the edge!' (*Kapitan Dikshtein* 46; *Captain Dikshtein* 48). History as a black hole that can mercilessly swallow people and events, rather than a utopian repository of Truth, and the heterotopic narrative balancing on the verge of this abyss and potentially capable of rescuing the slipping by textual means: these two notions become the axes that determine the problematic of Kuraev's—and Modiano's—writing.

One of the novel's two extended historical excursuses recounts the history of the town Gatchina, where Dikshtein lives in the 1960s. This town had innumerable powerful owners in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—from Catherine the Great's lover Grigorii Orlov to her son, the future Emperor Pavel, whose father was murdered by Orlov, to Pavel's son, Emperor Nicholas I; it was even offered by Catherine as a gift to Jean-Jacques Rousseau who, however, declined to become a Russian serf-owner. Pavel, denied his rights by his mother, tried to make his "own" Gatchina look like a model Ger-

man town, and Nicholas later took over Pavel's palace-building projects. The town, however, never developed the luster of other imperial residences, and in this century went into profound decline, exacerbated by the Nazi devastation. Excluded from major tourist routes, it did not receive the funds to restore its historic landmarks. It has also changed its name several times, first to Trotsk (the only town in Russia to be renamed after Trotsky), then to Krasnogvardeisk, after the Red Guards, then back to its original name.

An obscure town in decline, with many names and a convoluted history, described by the author at one point as a "Prekrasnaia dekoratsiia bessmyslennogo spektaklia, sygrannogo nevedomo dlia kogo i nevedomo zachem" 'wonderful stage set for a senseless performance played out no one knows for whom and why' (*Kapitan Dikshtein* 38; *Captain Dikshtein* 40, modified translation). Gatchina is in many ways comparable to its resident, the novel's protagonist. A former sailor, he participated in the 1921 sailor uprising in the city of Kronstadt on the island of Kotlin in the Gulf of Finland, the principal base of the Russian navy in the Baltic Sea since the eighteenth century, which, Kuraev tells us, also deserves to be "mesto, blagopriiatnoe dlia razygryvaniia fantasticheskikh istorii" 'recognized as a propitious place for the staging of a fantastic story' (*Kapitan Dikshtein* 44; *Captain Dikshtein* 46). After the uprising's defeat, the sailor assumed the name of one of the executed navy officers who took part in it, of Baltic German background (which, as the reader of this essay would note, he shares with Guy Roland's boss, Constantin von Hutte).<sup>19</sup> The blood-soaked uprising in Kronstadt was viewed as a great threat by the Bolshevik government, but subsequently underwent complete erasure from official Soviet history.<sup>20</sup> Kuraev narrates the history of the uprising and its repercussions throughout Russia, not as a singular authoritative version but as seen through the multiple and frequently conflicting viewpoints of its participants and contemporaries, through scraps of documents and hearsay. The lives of the two Dikshteins serve as examples of ordinary human beings thrown into the whirlwind of history. The blindingly bright episode of Kronstadt made the rest of their lives unreal, illusory. The second Dikshtein lived through the Stalinist purges and the concentration camps, the fighting at the front in World War II and the POW experience; however, all these are merely mentioned in a cursory fashion. It is as if he glided through a fog for the rest of his life, being "chelovek, kotorogo fakticheski kak by ne bylo" 'a man who in fact, as it were, didn't exist' (*Kapitan*



*Dikshtein* 11, *Captain Dikshtein* 14, modified translation). As the narrator emphatically notes, Dikshtein was never able to become, in Stalin's infamous metaphor, a human "cog," smoothly functioning in the machine of the totalitarian state (*Kapitan Dikshtein* 132, *Captain Dikshtein* 130).

Kuraev's Dikshtein and Modiano's Guy Roland share the experience of individual lives torn apart by twentieth-century history. They both occupy positions of utter invisibility, positions at the margin: Dikshtein, a man "o ktorom v liuboi instantsii skazhut, chto ne bylo takogo cheloveka i ne moglo byt'" 'who [officially] didn't and couldn't have existed' (*Kapitan Dikstein* 140),<sup>21</sup> and Roland, who says of himself, "Je ne suis rien. Rien qu'une silhouette claire, ce soir-là, à la terrasse d'un café" 'I am nothing. Nothing but a pale shape, silhouetted that evening against the café terrace' (*Rue des Boutiques Obscures* 11; *Missing Person* 7). They have lived through multiple, conflicting identities. And it is through the narrative itself, the heterotopic narrative of mixed, labyrinthine spaces and times, that their lives are actually constituted.<sup>22</sup> The narrative serves as the topos where the repressed or suppressed fragments of the traumatized memory, both individual and collective, are unearthed and joined together in an attempt to articulate and simultaneously confront the past.<sup>23</sup> As Kevin Telford remarks of Modiano's texts—and this also fully applies to works like *Kapitan Dikshtein*—they are the instances when writing functions as "a mechanism which allows for self-definition and which provides cohesion and unity in a chaotic and otherwise meaningless world." In narratives of this kind, textuality is what is proposed as "the solution to the crisis of identity" (347, 352).

Heterotopic texts not only rescue "minor" destinies from oblivion; most importantly, they decenter and subvert the claims to singular authorial access to Truth and History.<sup>24</sup> By paying attention to their multiple narratives, humanity might make itself more aware of the complicated and constructed character of its past and its representations of the past, to successfully partake of the project of "cognitive mapping—a pedagogical, political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system," as Fredric Jameson sees the positive, political edge of postmodern culture. "The political form of postmodernism," he continues, would "have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale" (54). Heterotopic texts contain the potential for moving in this direction.

## Notes

1. "And do not our lives dissolve into the evening as quickly as this grief of childhood?" (*Missing Person* 159).
2. "A dead, fallen leaf lay near Voshchev's head, brought by the wind from some distant tree; now this leaf was destined to find peace in the earth. Voshchev picked up the dry leaf and hid it in a secret compartment of his sack, where he collected all sorts of lost, unfortunate objects. 'You did not know the meaning of life,' Voshchev thought with careful sympathy. 'Lie here; I'll find out why you lived and died. Since nobody needs you and you are lying uselessly in the middle of the entire world, I will keep and remember you' " (*The Foundation Pit* 8, slightly modified).
3. The topic of coincidences is an important one within the two texts themselves.
4. See also Greimas's *On Meaning* (78), and A.J. Greimas and Joseph Courtès, *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary* (142).
5. As Steven Connor remarks in his critical survey of the theories of the postmodern, heterotopia, designating a "structure of radical incommensurability," becomes "a name for the whole centerless universe of the postmodern" (9).
6. But see also the recent dissertation by Cesare Casarino (Duke University, 1994), which provocatively develops the notion of heterotopia through a reading of the sea novels of Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad, and also Casarino's essay "Gomorrahs of the Deep, or, Melville, Foucault, and the Question of Heterotopia."
7. McHale considers such a possibility once, discussing Donald Barthelme's "The Indian Uprising," where he views the condition of "discursive orders that mingle promiscuously without gelling into any sort of overarching 'super-order' " as a heterotopia (163). He thus arrives at a dichotomy between ontological and discursive heterotopias (164), the latter immediately subsumed under the Bakhtinian notions of heteroglossia and polyphony. There is, perhaps, just one step from a heterotopia to a heteroglossia, but I believe the two terms aren't coextensive.
8. See Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (5, 7-8, 16, 20, 120).
9. See Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface," in his *The Anti-Aesthetic* (ix-xvi, esp. xi-xii).
10. See Gerald Prince, "Patrick Modiano" (147). Michel Tournier feels that "ce qui frappe chez [Modiano] c'est qu'on pourrait faire un seul livre des tous ces ouvrages réunis. L'ensemble est parfaitement ajusté, avec des cercles concentriques qui vont en s'élargissant" "what strikes in Modiano



is that one can make one single book out of all of his works assembled together. The ensemble is perfectly adjusted, with widening concentric circles' (quoted in Marja Warehime [335]; Warehime develops this argument further [335-36]).

11. Erofeev's vision of Nabokov's Ur-plot is remarkably similar: "osnovnym sodержaniem ili, skazhu inache, *ontologii* nabokovskikh romanov iavliaiutsia avantiury 'ia' v prizrachnom mire dekoratsii i poiski etim 'ia' takogo sostoianiia stabil'nosti, kotoroe dalo by emu vozmozhnost' dostoinogo prodolzheniia sushchestvovaniia" 'the main content, or, in other words, the ontology of Nabokov's novels, is the adventures of an ego in an illusory world of stage props and this ego's search for such condition of stability that would give it a possibility for a worthy continuation of existence' (175).

12. Or at least the first step presented to the reader; the narrative does not make it entirely clear whether Guy Roland's quest begins together with the novel itself or earlier.

13. In their study of Modiano, Colin Nettelbeck and Penelope Hueston suggest that this gap of a dozen years is of central importance in the narrative's construction (95).

14. For an analysis of *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* from the standpoint of its subversion of the detective genre, see Jeanne C. Ewert, "Lost in the Hermeneutic Funhouse: Patrick Modiano's Postmodern Detective."

15. This is precisely the interpretation that most critics would caution against. Colin Nettelbeck and Penelope Hueston, for instance, remark at the outset of their study: "Les romans de Modiano n'ont rien d'un traditionalisme irréflechi. Au contraire, s'ils dégagent une indéniable impression de nostalgie, celle-ci est constamment équilibrée par une ironie lucide qui tient compte de toutes les forces de fragmentation et d'éclatement caractéristiques de notre époque" 'Modiano's novels do not possess any thoughtless traditionalism. On the contrary, if they leave an undeniable nostalgic impression, it is constantly balanced by a lucid irony that takes into account all the forces of fragmentation and dispersion characteristic of our era' (3).

16. This aspect of Kuraev's work seems to have misled its English translator who, in her introduction to *Night Patrol*, goes so far as to assert that in contemporary Russian literature "the expected plunge into experimental prose of all kinds has not occurred. . . . At the moment, Russian literature is generally not innovative" (Margareta Thompson, "Introduction," in Kuraev, *Night Patrol and Other Stories* 1). It is outright impossible to agree with such a statement made in 1994: first, it denies the originality of Kuraev's own literary style; besides, by that time scores of experimental texts by the new generation of Russian writers successfully broke through

the aesthetic censorship of the literary establishment (which, although sometimes as harsh as the earlier political one of the totalitarian regime, also began to crumble in the late 1980s).

17. Consider, for instance, the following passage, displaying such classic Gogolian features as the “intrusive narrator” device and the mocking use of high verbiage, complete with scholastic terminology and occasional archaic forms (such as *koemu*), to describe an emphatically mundane event:

It's easy to imagine how moralists of various orientations will pounce on Igor' Ivanovich to expose the moral vulnerability of his attempts to locate precisely the yellow net bag. Let him look, let him look! Only blind pride could prevent one from seeing in this ultimate search an affirmation of order, of a higher authority in the world to which formerly even gods were subordinated. And since I know that the net bag is lying in the pocket of the kerosene jacket (he himself put it there) I'm not going to interrupt his search, for the philosophical and ontological meaning of his action is much higher than its everyday meaning. (*Kapitan Dikshtein*, in *Malen'kaia semeinaia taina* 19-20; *Captain Dikshtein*, in *Night Patrol* 23)

One of most skillful, and also the lengthiest exercise in a Gogolian narrative mode, however, can be found in Kuraev's second novel, *Nochnoi dozor*. This text is composed as a succession of fragments presented by two alternating narrative voices, one of which is a masterful simulation of the sometimes elegiac, sometimes sarcastic (and at times even tragic) tone of Gogol's St. Petersburg stories, used by Kuraev to describe the same city as it appeared a century later, at the height of Stalinist terror.

18. The incorporation of historical material signals another of Kuraev's indebtednesses to the Russian literary tradition, this time first and foremost to *War and Peace*.

19. We are never told the “real” name of Dikshtein the second; in the account of the sailors' uprising, he is referred to as “chubatyi” ‘the one with a forelock.’

20. However, an extensive English-language study of the uprising has been available since 1970: *Kronstadt, 1921* by Paul Avrich.

21. This phrase is changed beyond recognition in Thompson's translation.

22. In the case of *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, this is powerfully argued by Gerald Prince (*Narrative as Theme* 121-32, esp. 131-32).

23. This is the main thesis of the chapter on *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* of Nettelbeck and Hueston's study of Modiano:

Il s'agit . . . d'un processus de *déblocage*, dans ce sens que les débris du passé, figés par une mémoire traumatisée, sont libérés, remis en mouvement. En même temps, c'est un processus de création, car le

déblocage des histoires—individuelles et collectives—n'est que la première étape d'une nouvelle histoire, d'une nouvelle façon de raconter une histoire et l'Histoire. Déblocage et création: ce sont les deux forces qui sous-tendent, dans *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*, la composition métaphorique et structurale.

It is a matter of . . . a process of lifting blocks, a release, in the sense that the fragments of the past, frozen by traumatized memory, are liberated and put back into movement. . . . At the same time, this is a process of creation, since the freeing of narratives, both individual and collective, is nothing but the first stage of a new narrative, a new way of narrating both a story and History. Release and creation: these are the two forces underlying the metaphorical and structural composition of *Rue des Boutiques Obscures*. (99)

24. However, as noted earlier, they do not deny, but rather transform the historicity of a text; theirs is not a monolithic History but a heterotopic history. For instance, the works of Patrick Modiano, and *Rue des Boutiques Obscures* in particular, are discussed by Timothy Scherman as an example of such a postmodernist resistant mode of writing, where "the hesitations and perplexing lacunae" signify a "fallout of historicity . . . descending over the postmodern world" ("Translating from Memory" 294-95).

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